EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Inside

Medical Strike Team becomes reality

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All the discussion, classes and seminars about the threat of terrorism raises the question, "What can a jurisdiction do to counter this type of threat?" In the Washington, D.C. metro area, one solution has proven fruitful — the formation of a specialized response team called the Metropolitan Medical Strike Team (MMST).

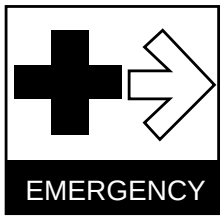
Shortly after the March, 1995, incident when sarin nerve agent was released in the Tokyo subway system, the Council of Governments (COG) sent a letter to President Clinton. The organization — which represents the interests of jurisdictions in the Washington, D.C. metro area — voiced concern that the area's public safety agencies were not prepared for a similar event. It pointed out that something needed to be done to provide first responders with the training and equipment to counter acts of chemical/biological terrorism.

In July of that year, a representative from the Office of Emergency Preparedness in the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) met with Arlington County's Emergency Services Coordinator, Chief Ed Plaugher, to discuss the issue. As a result of this meeting, the COG Fire Chiefs and HHS joined in a partnership to develop the "strike team" concept.

The initial concept of a medical strike team had been proposed by a working group of medical professionals and fire and EMS responders from across the nation. The group envisioned a team that could respond almost instantly to the site of a terrorist incident involving chemical or biological weapons. They would be able to render on-scene treatment to the victims of such an attack.

In January of 1996, the MMST steering committee met for the first time. The committee was made up of hazmat teams, paramedics, law enforcement officers, representatives from both state and federal agencies and staff from the private-sector company contracted to assist by HHS.

The committee discussed how the team should be configured, what its capabilities should be, what kinds of equipment should be purchased and how the team would operate. Committee members developed a plan that described the team, its role and functions.



The plan contains chapters on Alerting and Activation, Law Enforcement/ Intelligence, Equipment, Communications, Pharmacology and Training and includes a Field Operations Guide for the team. Although essentially complete — as with any good plan — the document is dynamic and continually changing.

With guidance from the Arlington Fire Department, equipment for the team was purchased using funds provided by HHS. Equipment was selected based on the team's capabilities which included the ability to enter a contaminated environment and operate in it, detect and monitor the presence of chemical or biological agents and decontaminate and provide medical treatment for mass casualties.

Based on these needs, equipment purchases included different types of hazmat entry suits, self-contained breathing apparatus, chemical agent detection equipment, medical supplies, antidotes and other items. The team also acquired another valuable resource: a decon trailer capable of decontaminating up to 400 victims per hour.

The team itself consists of three 43-person task forces that work in the Washington metro area. Each task force is capable of responding to the scene of a terrorist incident in 45 to 90 minutes when requested by the on-scene incident commander. Neither the MMST or its task force leaders supplant the authority of on-scene personnel. The function of the team is to provide reinforcement for response efforts.

The MMST deployed its first task force during the Presidential Inauguration in January. By July of this year all three task forces should be ready for deployment in the Washington metro area.

Currently, HHS is developing national teams which will be able to be deployed anywhere in the country if needed, and local teams which will function within their jurisdictions and the surrounding areas. The federal agency is working with Denver, Los Angeles County and Raleigh-Durham in North Carolina to implement national teams in these cities and with 22 other cities to develop local teams.

For further information, contact Capt. Mike Moultrie at 703/358-7601, e-mail T79@aol.com

"Infobook" offers high-speed capabilities

The Department of Military Affairs, VDOT, EMS, the State Police, VDES — what do these state agencies have in common? They all use the Emergency Information System (EIS) Infobook — both for day-to-day work and during disasters.

FEMA is another big user of this sophisticated software. The agency is incorporating EIS, as well as other software packages, into its ambitious National Emergency Management Information System (NEMIS) project.

VDES Information Systems Analyst Mark Pennington, said, "We chose EIS because, at the time, it was the only comprehensive package that could do everything we needed it to do. It's designed to be an all-hazards program and is not just aimed at chemical emergencies or hurricanes."

The software contains numerous high-powered databases that can support such functions as situation assessment, resource tracking and hazard analysis, to name a few. With these databases, users can create models for any kind of disaster. For example, a flood monitoring model can be designed that uses IFLOWS and other types of weather data. Such a model can serve as a proactive advance warning system for a locality.

"Basically, the software can be tailored to the locality's specific needs," said Pennington. "The software has a whole plethora of databases and other capabilities that aren't inherent in most other similar software."

The EIS Infobook runs on the Virginia Operational Information System (VOIS), Virginia's version of NEMIS. This state-level network allows participants to share real-time information during a disaster.

"Because a locality is not hooked up to VOIS doesn't mean it can't exchange data with other users, including those on the VOIS network," Pennington observed. "EIS has its own dial-up and internal e-mail capabilities. Data files can be attached to e-mail messages and sent out. In fact, the data sets can be shared in any of the ways a person would share word processing documents. The information just won't be real-time."

How can you foot the bill for the software package? Sharing the cost with local business — advice offered by EIS staff member Merrily Powell — is one way to go. Said Powell, "We offer a government-industry partnership capability for purchasing EIS software and we will be glad to work with the locality and industry on this."

For information, call Merrily Powell at 800/999-5009, ext. 315.

Leadership on the front lines

What a leader must know:
☆ How to motivate people and your subordinates in particular.
☆ Your own strengths and weaknesses.
☆ The strengths and weaknesses of your subordinates.
☆ How beliefs and values become instilled in people and how they can be changed.
☆ How character is developed.
☆ How people learn.
☆ How to develop morale, cohesion and discipline.
☆ How to teach individual and team skills necessary for unit effectiveness.
☆ How informal group norms or rules become instilled as beliefs and values in group members.
☆ How to teach and train others to become good leaders.
— *U.S. Army Leadership Manual*

Strategic planning part of VDES push into 21st century

Early this year, VDES staff participated in a 10-year strategic planning session designed to effectively transition the agency into a technological 21st century and a radically different emergency services world. Some divisions were restructured and renamed to better reflect their new responsibilities under the long-range plan.

One of the changes included the renaming of what was formerly the Finance and Grants Management Division which was rechristened Recovery and Administrative Services. "What helped precipitate the division restructuring was our realization that — more and more — computers and computer-related technology will be required to get the job done," said Harry Colestock, division director. The division has been assigned responsibility for two technology-related areas: the Management Information Systems and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

GIS provides a graphical interface for the operation of mapping software and, at this point, is primarily used for hazard mitigation and floodplain management projects. As staff are trained in the use of the system and the software, its functions will be expanded.

In addition, the division provides administrative support for the agency, both during disasters and on a day-to-day basis. This includes strategic planning, procurement, budget work and finance. The division's responsibilities also encompass management of the EMA program and the Public Assistance grant process.

"This name change focuses in on one of our major missions — disaster recovery," said Colestock. "It better reflects what we do as a division. We provide administrative services to all the sections and divisions within the agency as well as manage recovery activities during and after a disaster."

HAZ MAT

Two incidents offer lessons learned

A lot of change can be packed into five years. To illustrate this, take two similar hazmat incidents — the first occurred in September of 1992, the second in May of this year — and compare them to each other.

The results? First responders around the state have increased their awareness and training to such a point that response during the second incident might serve as a textbook example of the ways in which high-quality training pays off. It might also highlight the reasons why Virginia's local and state hazmat programs serve as models for other states across the country. What can be learned by comparing the two?

Incident One: On September 3, 1992, a tractor-trailer overturned on Interstate 81 near Radford. It was carrying 44 "super sacks" — heavy-duty soft containers made from an extremely strong nylon material — weighing about 800 pounds each. They were filled with lead stearate, a hazardous material that is an organic lead compound with a consistency like talcum powder.

Because the product did not require placarding, many of the workers and first responders initially did not suspect the product was hazardous. The responsible trucking company and the involved insurance company hired untrained workers to remove the truck and product. Despite the fact that some of the containers had ruptured, the damaged tractor-trailer was towed to a nearby garage.

On October 12, about half the containers at the garage were loaded into an undamaged trailer for transportation to a storage facility in the area. During this operation — conducted by an insurance adjuster and employees from the responsible trucking company — strong winds blew the fine powder from the ruptured containers into a nearby neighborhood. When a worried resident contacted the Sheriff's Office to complain, the incident was investigated and the Virginia EOC notified that same day.

The first VDES Hazmat Officer who responded to the scene, Jack Tolbert, called in the Roanoke Valley Regional Hazmat Team to help stabilize the situation. VDES Hazmat Officer Grady DeVilbiss arrived the next day.

"The incident involved a lot of personnel, time and expense," said DeVilbiss. "We had both on-site and off-site contamination. The workers from the garage site were covered with the material and brought it back to the motel they were staying in. We had to send them to the hospital and quarantine the motel." DeVilbiss pointed out that much time and effort were spent collecting extensive

(continued at top of page)

samples and conducting laboratory analyses to determine areas of contamination and to confirm cleaned areas were clean.

In fact, to clean up all of the contaminated sites cost between $800,000 and $1 million. Exposed individuals were tested and treated, and continued sampling was performed to ensure that everything contaminated had been identified and cleaned up. The incident was on emergency status for 45 days but related litigation continued for years.

By comparison, the May, '97 incident also involved a tractor-trailer wreck and a dangerous substance stored in super sacks. Similar to the lead stearate, the substance presented a high risk to the first responders and the surrounding community. "With that incident, though, trained personnel were immediately called out to help manage it," said DeVilbiss. No one was injured and the cleanup costs will be significantly less.

DeVilbiss continued, "There's a lot of hazardous material that's not required to be placarded but can still be hazardous in the right amounts and this incident is a case in point. The truck didn't require placarding, so initially there were no outward warning signs to the first responders at the scene that they were dealing with a hazardous material."

He said, "The lesson here is: follow the basics. Make the calls so that you know what you're dealing with. Even if the product is placarded, the shipping papers need to be checked to make sure the load is what the placard says it is."

(next month: Incident two)

Sites of interest on the information highway

If you want to find out more about the functions of VOAD, check out the home page of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD). This site offers information on the mission and the purpose of state-level affiliates as well as on training, leadership development and other topics. The links to the various religious denominations and other organizations under the national VOAD umbrella gives information about the kinds of resources these groups offer in a disaster. Go to: http://www.vita.org/nvoad/

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) has put together a publication for facilities managers and others to help them create emergency plans for evacuating employees with disabilities. Titled *"Emergency Procedures for Employees with Disabilities in Office Occupancies,"* this manual details the types of equipment and procedures needed to provide for the safety of disabled employees. You might want to offer this resource to the businesses in your area as well as use it for your own emergency planning.

For a copy of this free publication, order via FEMA's website at: http://www.usfa.fema.gov/pub.htm or write to USFA at Publications, 16825 South Seton Ave., Emmitsburg, Md., 21727. The publication ID number is 25, FA 154, Item 9-0041.

TRAINING

The Disaster Recovery Center Operations class, scheduled for September 4, has been cancelled.

Professional Development: Leadership and Influence
July 8-10
Richmond

Professional Development: Decision-Making and Problem-Solving
July 11
Richmond

Introduction to Emergency Management
July 22-24
Roanoke

Coordinators' Briefing
August 6-7
Culpeper

Mass Fatalities Incident Management
August 19-21
Newport News

Exercise Design
September 10-11
Chesterfield

For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/674-2458

Technological Hazards Division

Advanced Hazardous Materials Control
July 12-13
July 19-20
Martinsville

Public Safety Response to Terrorism
July 16
Charlottesville

August 13
Roanoke
For information, call the VDES Tech Haz Division at 804/674-2510

CAMEO Training Workshop
July 31-August 1
Woodstock
For information, call George Roarty at 804/674-2708

Conferences

Virginia Hazardous Materials Conference
September 25-27
Virginia Beach
For information, call Steve Grainer at 804/674-2458

EPA Region III Chemical Emergency Preparedness & Prevention Conference
December 2-5
Pittsburgh, Penn.
For information, call Al Brown at 215/566-3302

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Critical Incident Stress: Providing Support For Emergency Services Personnel
July 10
1:00-4:00 p.m.

Highlights are featured from the "World Congress on Stress, Trauma and Coping in the Emergency Services." Held in Baltimore this past April, the conference is a major international forum that reviews new developments in managing critical incident stress and other related topics. Develop your skills and learn effective ways to cope with stress and trauma, both for yourself and your team members.

National Alert Broadcast
July 16
2:00-3:30 p.m.

Emergency Food and Shelter Program Training Workshop
July 31
1:00-4:00 p.m.

This little-known FEMA program provides financial assistance to local communities in their fight against homelessness and hunger. Program staff members will describe how it works and answer questions from call-in viewers. For information, call 800/527-4893, 301/447-1068, e-mail sue.downin@fema.gov

Gray predictions on Internet

Colorado State University's hurricane forecaster guru, William Gray, is predicting a busy hurricane season for emergency managers on the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean coasts.

Gray predicted 11 named tropical storms, seven of which will become hurricanes, for the 1997 hurricane season. He says three of these will be major storms, with windspeeds exceeding 110 mph. Visit the CSU website to see his predictions at http://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/forecasts/index.html

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http://www.state.va.us/~des/des.htm